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Gender equity, traditional masculine culture, and female homicide victimization

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Abstract

Several prior studies of gender equity and female violent victimization showed a positive relationship between the two, with some scholars defining this as a backlash effect due to increasing gender equity in the context of conservative gender role expectations. This assertion was tested here under a more general set of theories about real and perceived threats to White male dominance in the United States that suggested that the positive relationship between gender equity and female victimization was conditioned by the strength of traditional masculine culture. Using cross-sectional data and employing a commonly tested baseline model to control for other structural covariates of homicide rates, variables were introduced to represent gender income equity and different components of traditional masculine culture. Results confirmed a positive cross-sectional relationship between gender income equality and White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization rates, but did not show the expected interaction effects, leading the authors to conclude that other structural or cultural factors were the source of the positive relationship.

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Introduction

This study examined the relationship between gender equity, traditional masculine culture, and female homicide victimization. Some previous studies showed gender equity was negatively associated with female violent victimization (Bailey & Peterson, 1995; Peterson & Bailey, 1992). Hypotheses generated from threat (Blalock, 1967) and backlash (Russell, 1975) theories, however, suggested a positive relationship between gender equity and female victimization, and recent empirical work provided support for this assertion (Gartner, Baker, & Pampel, 1990; Gauthier & Bankston, 1997; Whaley & Messner, 2003). Though rarely tested, many suggested this backlash effect might be the result of conservative gender role expectations and traditional masculine culture (Gibson, 1994; Hurlbert & Bankston, 1998). That is, while there might be a direct backlash effect of gender equity on female victimization, the magnitude of this effect might be conditioned by the local strength of this traditional masculine (sub)culture. According to these theories, a higher level of female empowerment represented more of a threat in areas where this subculture was strong, and thus female violent victimization rates were expected to be higher as males in these areas responded to this threat (Gartner et al., 1990).

Background

This article stems from a larger study examining the structural antecedents of cultural adaptations among some

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segments of the White American male population that helped determine cross-sectional variation in the United States of the development of and participation in right-wing paramilitary groups (Freilich, 2003). The authors extended this logic elsewhere to study the impact of these subcultural measures on homicide rates (Pridemore & Freilich, 2005) and crimes against abortion clinics (Freilich & Pridemore, 2005). The theory did not work well in explaining homicide, with one exception: gender income parity was positively associated with homicide rates. This result, together with (1) a major component of the theory that discussed challenges by women to White male control of American society, and (2) previous but rarely tested claims that a backlash effect might result from a more conservative patriarchal culture, lead the authors to test a similar model with female homicide victimization rates.

Previous literature

Most studies of gender equality and female victimization examined rape (Bailey, 1999; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Whaley, 2001), though recent research employed female homicide offending and victimization as dependent variables (Gauthier & Bankston, 1997; Whaley & Messner, 2003). Initial work focused on an expected *negative* relationship between gender equality and female victimization, arguing that male dominance and low female status resulted in (1) female victimization as a mechanism of maintaining male superiority, and (2) males acting with relative impunity given their control of social and legal institutions. These ideas received some empirical support in studies of both rape and homicide victimization (Bailey & Peterson, 1995; Baron & Straus, 1984; Peterson & Bailey, 1992; Smith & Brewer, 1995).

Recent research, however, focused on an expected *positive* relationship between gender equity and female victimization. This backlash hypothesis stressed an unintended consequence of female empowerment: increased gender equality represented a threat to male dominance and might result in higher rates of female victimization as males react defensively (Messerschmidt, 1993). This approach (Russell, 1975; Williams & Holmes, 1981) was similar to Blalock's threat hypothesis (1967) and also received some empirical support, with Bailey (1999), Brewer and Smith (1995), Vieraitis and Williams (2002), and Whaley (2001) showing a positive relationship between selected measures of gender equality and rape or female homicide victimization.

These results led some to argue that the impact of gender equity on female victimization was conditioned by the strength of traditional masculine subculture. Where these subcultural values were more strongly held, males were expected to be more threatened by gender parity and more willing to respond with violence. This implied an interaction effect of gender equality and culture, and thus the size of the positive effect of gender parity on female violent victimization should be larger in regions characterized by traditional masculine culture and dominance. For example, theoretical (Chafetz, 1990; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) and empirical work (Hurlbert & Bankston, 1998; Rice & Coates, 1995) suggested that conservative gender role expectations were stronger in the South, and Whaley and Messner (2003) showed a positive relationship between gender equality and male offender-female victim homicide rates in the South. Similarly, Gauthier and Bankston (1997) found that the ratio of males killing females to females killing males was significantly higher in the South, and Gartner et al. (1990) reported higher female homicide victimization in nations characterized by higher female participation in the labor force and in traditionally male roles, but only in countries where male status was higher.

Real and perceived threats to traditional White masculine culture in the United States

Gibson (1994, 1997) and Mason (2002) suggested that structural and cultural changes in the United States during the last four decades, including increasing equity between men and women, represented threats to White male dominance. Some in this group were embittered by real or perceived status loss, and according to several scholars, one major result was a backlash that led to the creation of a traditional masculine subculture (Chermak, 2002; Gibson, 1994) — characterized by conservative gender role expectations, traditionally masculine behavior, and a violent outlook — as an irrational form of collective behavior (Bell, 1963; Hofstadter, 1963; McAdam, 1982). While this subculture emerged as a result of several changes — including the military loss in Vietnam (that undermined Americans' conception of their country as invincible and pure), greater cultural diversity resulting from changes in the demographic makeup of the immigrant pool, and increases in non-White political power due to civil rights advances (that led some Whites to conclude that their power and status positions were declining) — the focus of this study was on gender equity and its meaning to this subculture and to the more general traditional and patriarchal White male culture in the United States.

The feminist movement began to achieve significant and visible gains in both the public and private spheres beginning in the 1960s. Some White American males, already angered by the perceived advances of minorities, felt further threatened by these developments. One important response to the frustration created by their perceived decreasing dominance was a retreat to a subculture in which White American males reigned supreme and traditional gender and family relations were stressed and maintained. According to Gibson (1994, p. 54), "the point is clear: the desirable future for these men is a return to the prefeminist past." One recent prominent example was the Promise

Keepers, a popular group acting as a subcultural vehicle designed to stress male leadership and female subordination, especially within the family (Mason, 2002). In other words, increased female (and minority) power in the *overall American culture* (and the decline of American power worldwide) led some White American males to respond with *subcultural* norms that emphasized male authority figures, White dominance, American power, and violence.

This subculture's endorsement of White male status, power, and violence was portrayed in novels, comic books (e.g., *Punisher* and *Vigilante*), magazines (e.g., *Gung-Ho* and *Soldier of Fortune*), games (e.g., paint ball), and movies (e.g., *Rambo: First Blood*). While each of these genres of entertainment obviously catered to a wider audience and sometimes explicitly to a female audience, there were those within each that clearly targeted their products to people holding the subcultural values discussed here, and these products were very popular among this group. In these works, when female characters appeared they were usually portrayed as loyal submissive appendages or dangerous sexual creatures. For example, Gibson (1994, p. 97) argued that to some, guns and female sexuality were intertwined. He argued that for some men "controlling the recoil of the weapon is like controlling a woman's body…[And often there are] graphic demonstrations equating combat weapons with woman's sexuality…[for instance, many] posters and videotapes feature naked women with guns and knives."

Fittingly, there was also a paramilitary aspect to this subculture that stressed 'real men' who not only displayed personal bravery, physical prowess, machismo, and a warrior ethos but who were also adept with guns and combat. Gibson (1994, p. 14) stated that this cultural response "infused individual men…and society with a deep attachment to both imaginary and real violence." Finally, another component of this subculture were more orthodox belief systems such as Protestant Fundamentalism that also stressed male dominance and other "traditional" family values. In short, this subculture transmits messages that endorse patriarchy, extreme masculinity, and violence.

Given this world view, one would not only expect increased female earning power — and the opportunities greater financial independence brings to both the business and private spheres — to threaten males' sense of authority, control, and masculinity, but the strength of the relationship between gender parity and female violent victimization should be higher in areas where this subculture was stronger. In other words, in places where traditional masculine culture and gender equity were stronger, White males embittered by challenges to their privileged status would adapt in ways congruent with their culture (Swidler, 1986) and employ violence against the most proximate and vulnerable threat as a mechanism of asserting power and maintaining control. Thus the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1. Gender equity is positively related to White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization rates.

Hypothesis 2. The effect size of the positive relationship between gender equity and White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization is conditioned by the local strength of traditional masculine culture.

Data and method

Data

The state was employed as the unit of analysis here for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Some examined the impact of gender equity on female victimization cross-nationally (Gartner et al., 1990), while others tested variations of this theme employing U.S. cities (Bailey & Peterson, 1995; Brewer & Smith, 1995; Gauthier & Bankston, 1997). In the current study, it would not make sense to use cities since the theory dictated that conservative gender role expectations and traditional masculine culture were diffused across urban, suburban, and rural settings (Chermak, 2002; Freilich, 2003; Pitcavage, 2001) and since cities and counties were likely too small to detect regional phenomenon such as subcultural norms (Baller, Anselin, Messner, Deane, & Hawkins, 2001). Whaley and Messner (2003) also argued that the impact of gender equity should be tested at multiple levels.

There were also important empirical issues. Homicide was a rare event and female homicide victimization was rarer. The validity of results that employed cities and counties might be compromised by zero or very low homicide counts that made the creation of a rate unreliable and lead to very skewed distributions, creating inefficient estimates (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 1998; Rivera, Chu, & Loftin, 2002). This was especially true when using only cases from the Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) known to have a single male offender and single female victim. Other studies used these data, but the number of these homicides was too small to calculate reliable rates in the majority of cases.[1]

The dependent variable was female homicide victimization. Since the theory tested here pertained mostly to Whites, the impact on overall and White non-Hispanic rates will be analyzed separately. These data were obtained from the Centers for Disease Control (2002) and rates were averaged over a three-year period (1998–2000). This represented the strongest data source for the dependent variable since (1) SHR data did not allow for reliable estimation of White non-Hispanic rates given the large proportion of cases with missing data on the ethnicity variable, and (2) the main interest here was with female *victims*.

Although it was true that the main interest was with victims, however, the theory also specified male offenders, but SHR data were unreliable in this regard because of the large proportion of data missing on at least one (and in most cases more) of the categories representing sex and ethnicity for offenders and victims. Thus, while imperfect, the vital statistics data contained more information necessary for this study of White non-Hispanic female victims than SHR data. Given the theory about who the perpetrators of these crimes were and the use of victimization data, it was also important to point out that (1) women were more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than any other type of assailant (Kellerman & Mercy, 1992), (2) for those cases where 2000 data were available on respective variables, about eleven times as many women were murdered by men they knew than were killed by strangers, and (3) 88 percent of the murders were not carried out during the commission of another felony (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002). The latter was also important to this sample since some types of felony homicides (e.g., robbery or burglary) would not seem to fit well into the theory to be tested here. It was thus likely that a very high proportion of the White non-Hispanic female victims in this sample were killed by White non-Hispanic males in non-felony-homicides.[2]

In order to provide a common and stable baseline model into which to introduce the variables of interest, similar measures and models as Land, McCall, and Cohen (1990) were employed, since their study was widely used as a template since its publication. These measures included population size and density, percentage of the population that was Black, percentage of the population that was male aged fifteen to twenty-nine, percentage of the male population over fifteen that was divorced, percentage of children seventeen and younger not living with both parents, median family income, percentage of families living below the poverty line, the Gini index, and percentage of the active labor force unemployed. All these variables were chosen based upon the findings from the large literature on social structure and homicide over the course of the last forty years (for recent reviews of this literature see Messner & Rosenfeld, 1999; Pridemore, 2002). The natural log was taken for population size and density, percent Black, percent fifteen to twenty-nine, and percent living in poverty, since the skew statistic for each was more than twice its standard error. All these measures were from the Census 2000 Summary File 3 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), with the exception of the state-level household-based Gini coefficient, which was obtained from the Survey Processing Branch of the Census Bureau's Housing and Household Economics Statistics Division. A dummy variable was employed for Southern states.[3]

Female economic empowerment was measured as the ratio of female median income to male median income. Three measures were used to represent the different aspects of traditional masculine, patriarchal, paramilitaristic subculture and because these theories and measures were more fully discussed elsewhere (Pridemore & Freilich, 2005), they were only briefly summarized here. First, since some argued right-wing extremism in general (Lipset & Raab, 1970) and anti-government paramilitary organizations in particular (Dyer, 1997) were more popular in rural areas, a measure of the proportion of the state population living in rural areas was included. The gender income equality and rural measures were both available from the Census 2000 Summary File 3 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002). Second, the rate per 100,000 population of Evangelical Protestants in each state was included to represent the traditionally religiously conservative and patriarchal aspect of paramilitary culture, which was driven largely by fundamentalism. Blanchard and Prewitt (1993, p. 27) noted, for instance, that Fundamentalist Protestantism stressed "male dominance in the home and traditional family values." These data were for 2000 and were available from the American Religion Data Archive (2003).[4] Finally, the rate per 100,000 population of NRA members was employed as a measure of the paramilitaristic, combat oriented aspect of the subculture. This was obtained from Audit Bureau of Circulation (2002) magazine subscription figures for *American Rifleman*.

Method

A baseline model was estimated using the Land et al. (1990) approach. That is, as a result of high multicollinearity when each measure was included individually, a resource deprivation/affluence principal component was constructed from poverty, median family income, the Gini coefficient, children under eighteen not living with both parents, percent Black, and a population structure component created from population size and density.[5] To this baseline model were added the earnings ratio, religious fundamentalism, NRA, and percent rural variables. Interaction terms were included for earnings by fundamentalism, South, NRA, and percent rural, since the theory suggested the effect of gender parity on female victimization was conditioned by the strength of traditional masculine subculture. As the theory pertained mostly to non-Hispanic Whites, models were estimated employing both overall female homicide victimization and White non-Hispanic victimization as dependent variables.

Results

Table 1 displays results using overall female homicide victimization as the dependent variable.[6] Model 1 was the baseline model from Land et al. (1990).[7] Model 2 showed results for gender income equality and the different components of the subculture. Models 3–6 showed results for the interaction terms.[8] First, the earning power of females relative to males, both individually and in the interaction terms, did not have an effect on overall rates of female victimization. Second, while p-values for the NRA variable did not allow for strong conclusions (they ranged from .06 to .10), the results suggested that further refined analyses were warranted, especially since Kellerman and Mercy (1992) showed that more than twice as many females were murdered by intimates with guns than were murdered by strangers by any means. Finally, fundamentalism, percent

Table 1
State female homicide victimization rates regressed on structural covariates, principal components, and new variables, 2000

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value
Constant	−7.103	.033	−13.316	.023	−11.209	.030	−8.533	.144	−7.455	.104	−10.654	.036
Res. dep.	.865 (.745)	<.001	.817 (.704)	.001	.828 (.713)	.001	.866 (.746)	.001	.762 (.656)	.003	.770 (.663)	.003
Pop. structure	.185 (.149)	.175	.218 (.176)	.237	.208 (.167)	.266	.149 (.120)	.444	.171 (.190)	.374	.184 (.148)	.333
Young[a]	3.549 (.239)	.008	4.100 (.276)	.022	4.030 (.272)	.025	3.180 (.214)	.106	3.745 (.252)	.040	3.671 (.248)	.050
Divorce	26.711 (.310)	.003	22.356 (.259)	.020	22.452 (.260)	.021	23.165 (.268)	.017	21.637 (.251)	.025	23.788 (.276)	.016
Unemployment	−17.548 (−.147)	.216	−15.059 (−.126)	.349	−12.449 (−.104)	.458	−14.975 (−.126)	.351	−10.733 (−.090)	.523	−9.566 (−.080)	.587
South	.177 (.072)	.552	.171 (.070)	.587	.101 (.041)	.766	.072 (.029)	.827	.211 (.086)	.510	.215 (.088)	.505
Female earnings			2.995 (.139)	.172	2.363 (.110)	.335	3.932 (.183)	.152	2.821 (.131)	.201	3.642 (.169)	.125
Fundamentalism			.379 (.038)	.820	.459 (.046)	.786	.740 (.074)	.664	.571 (.057)	.735	.388 (.039)	.817
NRA[a]			.522 (.191)	.062	.482 (.177)	.095	.420 (.154)	.099	.469 (.172)	.100	.487 (.179)	.086
% Rural			-7.1×10^{-4} (−.009)	.947	-4.5×10^{-5} (−.001)	.997	−.004 (−.056)	.697	−.003 (−.034)	.809	−.002 (−.032)	.823
Earnings × South					2.839 (.063)	.560						
Earnings × Fund.							34.282 (.126)	.299				
Earnings × NRA									3.515 (.079)	.382		
Earnings × rural											.134 (.083)	.446
Adjusted R^2	.703		.712		.707		.713		.710		.709	

[a] Natural log transformation.

Table 2
State White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization rates regressed on structural covariates, principal components, and new variables, 2000

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value	b(β)	p-value
Constant	−9.045	.002	−14.520	.002	−11.603	.005	−10.591	.024	−9.719	.008	−11.699	.004
Res. dep.	.492 (.441)	.003	.323 (.290)	.081	.314 (.282)	.093	.334 (.299)	.080	.279 (.251)	.143	.339 (.304)	.080
Pop. structure	.121 (.102)	.282	.084 (.070)	.558	.092 (.077)	.524	.068 (.057)	.656	.047 (.039)	.754	.095 (.080)	.521
Young[a]	3.129 (.220)	.005	3.442 (.242)	.014	3.500 (.246)	.013	3.238 (.228)	.039	3.164 (.252)	.027	3.589 (.252)	.016
Divorce	40.353 (.488)	<.001	38.755 (.468)	<.001	38.676 (.467)	<.001	38.935 (.470)	.000	38.193 (.461)	<.001	38.262 (.462)	<.001
Unemployment	6.879 (.060)	.557	16.209 (.142)	.197	14.056 (.123)	.284	16.227 (.142)	.202	19.593 (.171)	.139	14.318 (.125)	.302
South	.509 (.217)	.044	.466 (.198)	.063	.524 (.223)	.053	.444 (.189)	.093	.497 (.212)	.051	.451 (.192)	.080
Female earnings			5.026 (.244)	.005	5.547 (.110)	.006	5.234 (.254)	.007	4.890 (.237)	.006	4.803 (.233)	.012
Fundamentalism			1.1767 (.123)	.368	1.110 (.116)	.400	1.256 (.131)	.352	1.325 (.138)	.316	1.172 (.122)	.375
NRA[a]			.178 (.068)	.404	.211 (.081)	.342	.155 (.059)	.497	.137 (.052)	.530	.190 (.073)	.386
% Rural			-6.3×10^{-4} (−.008)	.939	−.001 −.016)	.888	−.001 (−.019)	.870	−.002 (−.029)	.801	-3.7×10^{-5} (.000)	.997
Earnings × South					−2.343 (−.054)	.536						
Earnings × Fund.							7.606 (.029)	.769				
Earnings × NRA									2.750 (.064)	.379		
Earnings × rural											−.046 (−.030)	.737
Adjusted R^2	.777		.811		.807		.806		.809		.806	

[a] Natural log transformation.

rural, and regional location in the South were all nonsignificant in each of the models.

Table 2 shows the results of model estimation employing White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization as the dependent variable. Gender income parity was positively and significantly related to the cross-sectional variation of these rates in all models. As expected, White females in states with higher female-male earnings ratios had higher victimization rates. Rates also appeared to be consistently higher in the South, a region suspected of possessing a stronger traditional masculine culture, though p-values ranged from .04 to .09 and so caution must be used when drawing conclusions about this relationship. Models 3–6 in Table 2 showed the results for the interaction terms, none of which were significant. Since the individual NRA, fundamentalism, and rural variables were meant to represent different characteristics of the underlying traditional, masculine, paramilitaristic subculture, a factor was also created using these three variables via principal components analysis (factor loadings were between .55 and .80). When models were re-estimated using this factor (results were not reported here in order to conserve space, but are available from the authors), the factor was consistently nonsignificant while the inferences drawn for the other measures in Tables 1 and 2 remained the same.

In terms of the hypotheses outline above, the results showed support for Hypothesis 1 but not for Hypothesis 2. That is, there was a positive “backlash” effect of gender equity on White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization rates, but the size of this effect was not conditioned by measures representing the strength of the local masculine and patriarchal subculture.

Discussion

Results from the handful of earlier studies of the relationship between gender equity and female homicide were inconsistent. Bailey and Peterson (1995) showed some evidence that female victimization was higher where gender equality was lower, while Vieraitis and Williams (2002) and Whaley and Messner (2003) showed the opposite. The latter study, as well as those by Gartner et al. (1990) and Gauthier and Bankston (1997), provided evidence for a positive relationship in areas characterized by a stronger patriarchal and more traditionally masculine culture.[9] Brewer and Smith (1995) showed that higher gender occupational parity, as measured by aggregate rates of full-time employment and proportion of men and women in managerial and professional occupations, was associated with higher rates of female homicide victimization. These results coincided with studies that showed a backlash effect among Whites, but not studies that showed an increased effect in the South or in other areas characterized by traditional masculine culture or conservative gender roles.

For decades (Gastil, 1971; Hackney, 1969; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), researchers used regional location as a proxy for culture of honor or Southern subculture of violence. The theory outlined here focused not on regional culture, but on a subculture hypothesized to be characteristic of part of the American White male population that feels threatened by the increasing independence and power of traditionally marginalized groups. The authors did not believe this subculture, characterized by conservative gender role expectations and paramilitaristic behavior, was wholly present or absent by region. While it might be more prevalent in certain more rural regions, as the brief discussion above indicated, it existed in varying degrees throughout the nation. Although difficult to measure at the aggregate level, an attempt was made here to gauge the strength of different components of this subculture and how it varied throughout the country that went beyond simple presence or absence by regional location.

The results in Table 1 showed that gender income equity, regional location, fundamentalism, and percent rural were unrelated to overall female homicide victimization rates. The latter was consistent with other types of female victimization data from the National Crime Victimization Survey that showed little variation by urban/rural location in rates of intimate partner violence against women (Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1997). These results did show, however, that the impact of NRA membership on overall rates deserved further attention, perhaps not simply as a general cultural measure but as a more specific measure of gun ownership and availability (Miller, Azrael, & Hemenway, 2002).

The findings presented in Table 2 revealed that gender income equity was related to White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization rates and that these rates were significantly higher in the South. The latter finding was consistent with studies that showed that, when appropriate controls were taken into account, White rates were regionally patterned but Black (Parker & Pruitt, 2000) and overall rates (Pridemore & Freilich, 2005) were not. The results for the interaction terms in Models 3–6 did not support the thesis that the backlash effect of gender equity was more likely in areas characterized by conservative gender roles and a more traditional masculine culture.[10]

The finding that the risk of homicide victimization resulting from gender income equality was significant for Whites but not for overall rates was important.[11] One interpretation of this provided partial support for the patterning of the backlash hypothesis. That is, the backlash effect might not be higher in *areas* with more traditional traits, but the threat of gender income equality might be more acutely felt among certain *groups*, in this case mostly lower middle class White males, who experienced real and perceived status loss on several fronts. This interpretation would provide limited support for the Gibson hypothesis.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to keep in mind when considering the findings presented above. This was the first study to test the theories of Gibson (1994), Mason (2002), and others as they related to female violent victimization, and thus these measures of different aspects of this subculture were not subjected to rigorous validation procedures. Nevertheless, the measures adhered closely to Gibson's assertions and certainly went well beyond a simplistic regional proxy. Note as well that besides the NRA variable, the number of far-right wing militia groups in a state (Freilich, 2003; Van Dyke & Soule, 2002) was also employed as a measure of the paramilitaristic aspect of the subculture. The results of this measure were consistently nonsignificant.

A second limitation was the state-level analysis. There was clearly within-state heterogeneity on subcultural traits and it was hard to imagine a culture that depended directly on state boundaries. When possible the theory should dictate the unit of analysis, however, not simply data availability, and the theory suggested that larger units were more appropriate than cities or counties for testing these ideas. When attempting the difficult task of measuring subcultural norms and examining their impact on behavior at the aggregate level, the selection of any unit of analysis would be necessarily arbitrary to some extent and one was forced to pick the "closest" unit for which data existed. In this case, it seemed that cities and counties might be too small to accurately capture the traits of the subculture examined here and the authors agreed with those who studied these specific subcultures that their characteristics were diffused across urban, suburban, and rural space.

The final main limitation was that the aggregate victimization data did not provide victim and offender sex and ethnicity for each incident. While previous studies suggested a large percentage of White non-Hispanic female victims were killed by White non-Hispanic male offenders, this was not true for every case, and thus some of the homicides included here did not fit this sampling frame. Although imperfect, given the discussion in the data section of the relatively small number of female homicide victimizations and the proportion of cases in the SHR for which ethnicity and sex of both victim and offender were missing, this alternative was likely the best way to test this particular theory, though the limitations must be recognized when interpreting these results. This was bolstered by previous research that showed the small proportion of females victimized in this manner by strangers (and in felony murders) and the large proportion victimized by intimate partners specifically and males in general. Finally, when estimating similar models for White non-Hispanic male offending with SHR data in an attempt to triangulate results given these data limitations, the results were consistent with those presented here (Pridemore & Freilich, 2005).

Conclusions

Given their findings, Whaley and Messner (2003, p. 201) stated the importance of "examin[ing] the different social conditions under which…backlash processes are invoked." Similarly, Vieraitis and Williams (2002, p. 57) showed a positive relationship between gender equality and female victimization for Whites but not for Blacks and asked, "Why do the effects of relative status affect the homicide victimization rates of White women but not Black women?" This study tested the efficacy of a set of related ideas that might answer these related questions. That is, the theories argued that some White males responded to real or perceived threats to their privileged status and power with what they believed to be the appropriate tool given their (sub)cultural norms (Swidler, 1986): in this case, violence directed at the threat. In this study support was found for a backlash effect of gender equity on White non-Hispanic female homicide victimization, but no evidence was found that the strength of the relationship was conditioned by the strength of a masculine subculture. It was notable, as well, that the effects applied to Whites but not to overall rates, which might offer some limited support for the theories, though seemingly not through the mechanisms tested here.

Whaley (2001) showed that the association between gender parity and female victimization might be positive in the short-term, but negative over longer periods. She concluded that the initial threat to males' privileged status might result in an immediate backlash. As women become increasingly empowered and gain access to a wide range of social, economic, and political opportunities over time, however, the local culture may begin to change, becoming less conservative in gender role expectations and less accepting of some aspects of a traditional masculine culture, including violence. This seemed relevant to the findings presented here. Groups with initially higher levels of power have more to lose, and the erosion of this power may at first create the perceived threat and backlash seen among Whites. Over time, however, society may reach a point where increased equity is no longer such a threat and thus does not create higher rates of female victimization.

In sum, earlier studies provided disparate findings. Those who showed evidence of a backlash effect, especially in certain areas (e.g., the South) or among certain groups (e.g., White females), call for further research on the structural and cultural mechanisms that might explain these results. The theories tested here posited an explanation of both these contextual effects. Keeping in mind the limitations discussed earlier, the findings did not support the idea that areas with higher exposure to and expression of traditional masculine culture and conservative gender role expectations were more sensitive to gender income equity and thus more strongly resisted this encroachment via violent victimization of women. The findings did show, however, that among the group with the most to lose (i.e., White males), there did appear to be a backlash effect of gender income equality on female homicide victimization.

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Notes

1. The total number of female homicide victimizations in the United States was 1,932 in 1998, 1,825 in 1999, and 1,750 in 2000. This number distributed across the 3,142 counties in the United States obviously meant a zero for many counties and unreliable rates in many more. Other potential complications with the SHR data were found. As one simple example, Florida data were unavailable between 1998 and 2000, Kansas reported in only one of these years, and Alabama, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin in only two. For other problems associated with the UCR crime and homicide estimates at the county level, see Baller, Messner, Anselin, and Deane (2002), Maltz and Targonski (2002, 2003), Rivera et al. (2002), and Wiersema, Loftin, and McDowall (2000).

2. Even though the authors believed this was the best way to get at the theoretical specifications, they also recognized the limitations. For example, male and female offenders were confounded, as were Black and White offenders. Were reliable data available from the SHR for victims and offenders, it would be ideal to choose White non-Hispanic male offender-female victim dyads, but the vast majority of cases had missing data. Nevertheless, in recognition of these limitations, Pridemore and Freilich (2005) tested these theories in relation to White non-Hispanic male offending using the SHR data. The results from their models using male offending were consistent with their models using overall victimization data and with the findings presented here using female victimization data.

3. In keeping with other studies, these Southern states included Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

4. A complete listing of all Evangelical Protestant groups is available from the ARDA website at http://www.thearda.com/RCMS/2000/Denoms/evangelical.html.

5. While the Land et al. (1990) study was used and cited widely, there were some criticisms of it, such as the inclusion of percent Black in the resource deprivation/affluence component, since a high factor loading in itself was not sufficient justification for including a variable in a composite measurement (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1994). In order to provide a baseline for the present analysis and for comparison with the work of others, however, and since the main interest in the structural covariates in this study was only as controls when evaluating the claims of the new theories tested here, the Land *et al*. measures and methodology were used.

6. In order to conserve space in this brief article, tables displaying univariate statistics and the correlation matrix are not included here. These are available from the authors.

7. The factor loadings were at least .51 for each of the variables in the resource deprivation component. Several diagnostic techniques (Fox, 1991; Hartwig & Dearing, 1979) were used to test OLS assumptions for these data and to ensure model stability. The leverage value for Alaska showed an outlying score on the X-axis, and the DFBETA for unemployment revealed the state's disproportionate influence on the regression line. Alaska continued to exhibit undue influence and was dropped from the analysis. All other inferences remained the same. Finally, while variance inflation factors suggested that the inclusion of the population structure component and percent rural in the same model were not a problem, they were correlated with each other above .5, revealing the possibility of problems with partialling. Thus identical models that excluded the population structure component were also estimated. There were no differences in the inferences drawn either for the percent rural variable or for the other variables in the model.

8. In order to correct for the multicollinearity introduced into the model when interaction terms were included, the variables used to create them in Models 3–6 in Tables 1 and 2 were centered to remove nonessential collinearity.

9. One reason for inconsistencies in the literature was likely the use in several studies of city-level SHR data. Theoretically, it was suspected that the subcultural traits hypothesized by Gibson and others were diffused throughout society and that employing cities as units of analysis might not appropriately capture it. Empirically, the low number of female homicide victimizations, especially when using only those victimizations for which there was a known male offender, might create reliability problems when estimating female homicide victimization rates and potentially invalidate OLS results. Another possible source of incompatible results were different measures of gender equity across studies, some of which focused on income equality only and others that included several measures of gender equity.

10. Pridemore and Freilich (2005) found gender equality to be significantly related to overall White non-Hispanic homicide rates, which was consistent with one aspect of the feminist literature that suggested increased gender parity could trigger male on male violence. For example, Whaley and Messner (2003, p. 192) stated that "gender equality generates (via threats to masculinity). . .male propensities toward violence more generally, not simply violence targeted toward women."

11. Similar analyses (not shown here) were undertaken with state rape rates as the dependent variable. Results showed no impact of gender equity or of the interaction terms on rape.

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